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ABSTRACT

A review of contributions to the Modern Languages Project of the Council for Cultural Cooperation shows that all the project activities derive from the recognition of the importance of stimulating and maintaining motivation. Studies have shown that the key to this objective is the willingness to let participants take responsibility for their own learning. Terminal and intermediate objectives chosen by the learners play an important role in motivating learners for sustained efforts. Another important factor is the availability of multimedia resources; use of these resources and systems is indispensable if the maximum number of learners are to be given access to language learning facilities. This overview of various aspects of promotion of foreign language learning by adults suggests a number of lines of development and experimentation to be considered in the Council of Europe's framework. These deal with: (1) identification of adult learning objectives, (2) continued pilot experimentation, (3) methods development, (4) development of procedures for promoting autonomy in language learning, and (5) promotion of multimedia systems for communicative language learning. (AMH)

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LANGUAGE LEARNING IN HIGHER, FURTHER AND ADULT EDUCATION, INCLUDING MULTI-MEDIA PROGRAMMES

by

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Language learning in higher, further and adult education, including multi-media programmes

The target groups comprised under the multiple heading of higher, further and adult education are immensely varied and heterogeneous, but they have, on the whole, one thing in common: they are voluntary learners. The undertaking of a learning-task, for them, is the result of a free choice, of a deliberate decision, a decision made because they feel that they will benefit from mastering whatever they undertake to learn. Fortunately it would be erroneous to say that this can never be true of pupils in general school education, but yet up to a certain age school education is compulsory, it is prescribed by law, and however conscious the pupils may be, in favourite circumstances, of the potential benefits of receiving this education, their expectations of such benefits are less direct than in the case of other target groups, and, anyway, legal and/or social pressures make them a captive rather than a free audience. This means that, although we know that motivation is one of the strongest factors in determining learning success for all learners, we have to recognise the fact that for the target groups discussed in the present paper it is of specially great importance since without the motivation to learn we would have no learners at all.

The Modern Languages Project of the CDCC, launched in 1971, was originally concerned wtih adult language learning only. Its aim was to promote such language learning. It is not surprising, therefore, that all the activities undertaken in the framework of this project ultimately derive from the recognition of the overriding importance of stimulating and maintaining motivation.

In order that learning may take place at all it must be felt to be worthwhile, not just worthwhile in a vague general sense but worthwhile to the individual in that particular individual's own unique situation. In other words, it must satisfy that individual's needs and wishes as effectively and efficiently as possible. From this it follows that learning-programmes must be learner-directed and cost-effective, cost-effective primarily in terms of the learner's investment of time and energy. The main efforts, therefore, of the Modern Languages Project Group have been directed towards determining potential learners' needs, developing learner-oriented objectives and creating maximally effective conditions for reaching these objectives.

The comprehensive study by Richterich and Chancerel, Identifying the needs of adults learning a foreign language, has already served as a basis for determining learners' needs in a wide variety of situations in several different countries, both inside and outside Europe. It has enabled those responsible for the provision of learning facilities to aim at real people rather than stereotypes, to cater for individuals here and now rather than for amorphous masses with indeterminate backgrounds. Yet, as the authors themselves point out, needs cannot be determined for once and for ever, needs-analysis is an ongoing activity to be integrated into the continuous planning of learning-programmes. Needs will change, develop even during the learning-process, and in order to keep the learning-programme satisfying and stimulating this change will have to be scrupulously monitored and taken into account in the further development of this programme. Ambitious though this may seem it is by no means unrealistic

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provided that the learning-programme can be made truly flexible. We shall return to this later on in this paper. Meanwhile, even if the full integration of needs-analysis into learning-programmes may still take a long time to achieve in the large majority of learning-situations, this should not prevent us from at least carrying out initial needs-analyses wherever this is possible. That this can be achieved even with very simple means is reported by Salin in his contribution to the Modern Languages Report (1):

> "It is not necessary to use sophisticated methods of analysing the language needs of the learners. This can usually be done with rather simple questionnaires or informal discussions. It is only a matter of attitude or willingness on the part of the teacher/tutor to let the participants take some responsibility their learning ..."

The final part of the quotation from Salin is the key to most of our efforts, the key to the stimulation and maintenance of motivation: "... to let the participants take some responsibility for their learning ...". The willingness to take this responsibility, and consequently to make the required efforts to achieve their objectives, demands recognition of the why and what of the learning-programme. This recognition will come the more readily as the learners are the more closely involved in finding out and expressing their own needs, in formulating their own objectives and in devising, as far as possible, their own learning-programmes.

In my contribution to the Modern Languages Report I have dealt extensively with the nature and roles of language-learning objectives and with the ways in which they may be formulated so as to give meaningful direction to the development of learning-programmes and to the learning itself. It is almost like stating the obvious when one says: "... terminal objectives set up or chosen by the learners themselves (...) constitute a powerful source of motivation: they describe that which the learners wish to be able to do". And again: "... intermediate objectives (...) play an important role in motivating the learners for the sustained effort that any learning-task of longer duration requires. Particularly if the intermediate objectives are closely related towards the terminal objective they enable the learners to take note of their own progress, providing them with the satisfaction that meaningful progress is being made". The model for the specification of language learning objectives developed in the framework of the Modern Languages Project and embodied in the various threshold level specifications has already proved its suitability in a wide variety of language-learning situations. Apart from the direct use of the threshold levels themselves the model has been successfully applied in the designing of learning-programmes for such widely different groups as general learners in study-circles, management trainees and prospective waiters, hairdressers and optometrists. What is especially important is that this model allows the formulation of learning-objectives in such a way that they can be understood by even the most unsophisticated learners and that these learners can manipulate them as required. To quote Salin again: "the experimentation has shown that it is possible to make these students (...) aware of what options are available and to make them more active and responsible for their learning".

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(1) Report "Modern Languages: 1971-1981".

The full recognition of the learners' individual and varied needs and the development of corresponding learner-centred objectives will inevitably lead to an increased need for highly differentiated and flexible learning-programmes and learning-materials. In his contribution to the Modern Languages Report Halm points out that this orientation towards single target groups raises special problems for publishers of learning-materials. In the same volume Porcher describes a possible solution of these problems in the form of "particularly flexible teaching materials that would enable each learner to find his own way according to his own particular situation and his own objectives." This material, developed by CREDIF (Centre de Recherche et d'Etude pour la Diffusion du Français) for the teaching of French to a variety of target groups in Greece and to be published under the name of Archipel, is characterised by Porcher as follows: "As is virtually always the case in such circumstances emphasis was placed, by reason of their very flexibility, on authentic materials. These were supplemented by devising a grammatical progression which was both open-ended and rigorous, constituting the backbone of the method."

So a common core with optionally exchangeable materials. Schärer reports comparable and even more ambitious developments in Eurocentres:

"- extension of the communicative approach to syllabus design through a common-core syllabus to levels beyond threshold in the teaching of the five languages in the Eurocentre programme;

- further development of individualised and guided study - and hence increased learner-centred learning - through the development of multi-media resources centres".

It is generally recognised that the learning-materials to be made available to the learners should not "only" be geared towards developing a purely linguistic functional skill. It could be argued, of course, that there is no such thing as "a purely linguistic functional skill" since the ability to use foreign-language forms appropriately requires a knowledge of denotations and connotations that can only be acquired through some familiarity with the socio-cultural context in which the language is used by native speakers. However, language-use being one of the most significantly human forms of behaviour it would be a fallacy to regard foreign-language acquisition as no more than the mastering of another communicative code. Language-use plays an enormously important part in the development of each individual and language-learning inevitably means more than the acquisition of a technical skill. The broader educational context from which foreign-language learning derives its full significance was the concern of a working-party set up by the Project Group in 1979 to consider "an overall model for the specification of language learning objectives more complex than those set out in the threshold level documents". Trim formulates the basic philosophy as follows:

"In an educational context we are not simply concerned with training certain kinds of skilled behaviour, but also (...) with the steady and purposive development of the learner as a communicator and as a learner, as well as with his personal and social development".

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The most generally recognised and adopted means towards the implementation of this philosophy is that which is referred to as "the promotion of learner-autonomy". "Promoting learner-autonomy" means "enabling the learners to increasingly take charge of their own learning". Language-learning, in this context, contributes to the capacity of individuals to take charge of their own further development, to make their own decisions, in short to assume more fully the responsibilities of adult life in a democratic society.

The recognition of this wider educational perspective and the importance attached to the promotion of learner-autonomy are apparent from the large majority of the contributions to the Modern Languages Report by those involved in actual teaching-situations. Learner-autonomy impinges on every aspect of the learning programme and its planning. It affects, and may even determine, the selection of objectives, materials, learning-methods, and procedures for self-assessment.

The feasibility of increasing learner-autonomy is no longer in doubt. Experimentation, as reported by Salin, has shown that it is possible to make students "more active and responsible for their learning". "Experiments with different forms of self-assessment", he goes on to say, "have shown that the students are well capable of assessing their own proficiency, if they have had some training and use appropriate tools". One significant result of the attempt to promote learner-autonomy is a notable increase in motivation. The experiments in Sweden have shown that "the motivation has increased, there have been very few drop-outs and the results have improved in courses where the learners have had the possibility to influence the contents of the course, the choice of materials and methods of work".

Schärer, reporting on the Eurocentres experiments, is not the only one to point out that multi-media resources may play a prominent role in providing the learner with the variety of differentiated learning-experiences that is a precondition for learner-centred education.

The first multi-media course to be based on the work of the Modern Languages Project of the CDCC, Follow Me, has already made a huge impact In Austria alone, early in 1981, 100,000 viewers followed the weekly transmissions, and Fitzpatrick mentions an average of 1 - 1/2 million for the television programmes in the Federal Republic of Germany. Of even more significant importance, however, is its influence on foreign language learning and teaching in general. Not only for the learners but also for most teachers Follow me is the first concrete example of a course based on the communicative approach advocated by the Modern Languages Project Group. It demonstrates the viability of this approach and provides a powerful stimulant to participate in innovation programmes, In his contribution to the Modern Languages Report Fitzpatrick describes how "some 1400 teachers were introduced to the Follow Me project at courses throughout the Federal Republic". "In addition to dealing with teacher training problems specific to Follow Me, he reports, "the project gave impetus to teacher training in foreign language learning and adult education in general and has established a network of teacher trainers at regional level throughout the Federal Republic". In the same volume Satzinger reports in similar though more explicit terms on a parallel development in Austria :

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"In 1979 a very basic and efficient tutor training scheme was started in co-operation with the DVV and on an international basis. 25 tutors for pilot courses were concerned. The training gradually became more independent and was not restricted to the Follow Me courses only but was expanded to language learning in general, ie in terms of communicatively defined learning objectives which consider the needs of individual learners, of a new teacher-learner relation that gives the learners as much autonomy as possible, of a communicative approach that uses transfer in all sorts of practice and individual application and of new ways of evaluation which make the learners aware of the criteria of their own progress and lead them to self-assessment. This goes far beyond a simple preparatory training for Follow Me and intends to improve language learning for adults in general."

The use of multi-media systems is indispensable if the maximum number of potential learners are to be given access to language learning facilities. On the one hand, multi-media courses bring tuition into people's homes, thereby removing the barrier of having to enlist for organised instruction, on the other hand they may encourage learners to seek further learning-facilities by joining classes organised for the full exploitation of the multi-media materials. Meanwhile, the very success of Follow Me has given rise to demands for a much more far-reaching examination of the potential roles of multi-media systems in a wide variety of language-learning conditions. This examination should not only concentrate on the use of complete course packages but also, and perhaps mainly, on the possibilities of a flexible exploitation of a variety of materials, with both sequentially ordered and exchangeable components.

In conformity with several contributions to the Modern Languages Report the above overview of various aspects of the promotion of foreign language learning by adults suggests a number of lines of development and experimentation to be considered in the framework of the language programme of the Council of Europe:

1. Identification of further objectives for adult language learning and the exemplification of such objectives

Although developed for the largest single target group of adult learners, The Threshold Level and its various versions for Spanish, German, Italian and Danish do not cater for the needs of numerous other potential adult learners. Un niveau-seuil caters for several target groups simultaneously but not directly for any single one. To preclude unwarranted generalisation of The Threshold Level at least a few other objectives should be developed, on the basis of the same principles but meant for other target groups of adult learners. They would serve as models (examples) for further objectives to be developed elsewhere, and, together with The Threshold Level, they would demonstrate both the potential for needs-oriented diversification of the underlying model and the systematic coherence of different objectives based on this model. It should also be attempted to construct one or two exemplificatory higher-level objectives for specific target groups, demonstrating the application of the same underlying principles to objectives at different levels. The relation between each of the objectives to be developed and the identified needs of the target groups concerned should be made as explicit as possible so that the procedures for establishing this relationship become apparent.

2. Continued pilot experimentation in communicative language learning

Although a number of pilot experiments directly based on the work of the Modern Languages Project are being carried out in various countries, much work still remains to be done in order to ensure adequate coverage of the highly varied learning-conditions in the member countries of the CDCC. Extension of the experimentation scheme will be welcomed in several countries, particularly those where experimental innovation is being considered but the required know-how is lacking. The support and guidance of a CDCC Project Group could be instrumental in setting up valid experimentation programmes and thus pave the way for the required reforms. The experimentation would have to include a variety of learning materials and to cover various languages in various countries.

3. Methods development

Methods, no less than objectives, have to be based on a careful assessment of the needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of the adult learner. The application of coherent and consistent principles to different learning situations will yield different solutions from case to case. Within the overall language programme of the Council of Europe, projects should therefore aim to broaden and deepen the pool of evaluated common experience rather than to promote some dogmatic methodology. In this context special attention is to be paid to problems of differentiation.

4. Examination and development of procedures for the promotion of autonomy in language learning

Apart from general problems of learner-autonomy, such as compatibility with highly organised educational systems, the changed roles of teachers, differentiation of learning programmes and objectives within one educational system, etc, foreign language learning poses a number of specific problems, such as the selection of objectives, materials, learning methods, and procedures for self-assessment. In a few centres significant progress has been made towards the solution of these problems. Yet, much more remains to be done, especially if possible solutions are to be made more generally valid. As a first step information should be collected on theoretical insights as well as practical experiences in this field. Subsequently case studies should be produced on the basis of pilot experiments.

5. Promotion of the development of multi-media systems for communicative foreign language learning

As argued above, experimentation should not only be concerned with the use of complete course packages but also, and perhaps mainly, with "a flexible exploitation of a variety of materials, with both sequentially ordered and exchangeable components". Experimentation of the latter kind is necessary in order to achieve the breakthrough that is required for the full utilisation of the specific potential of the multi-media systems as opposed to their more traditional use as technologically sophisticated vehicles for basically the same kind of instruction that used to be provided by textbooks.